



Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE)

[Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program](#)

2019 Request for Proposals

IMPORTANT DATES

Request for proposals release:	November 28, 2018
Informational webinar for applicants:	December 17, 2018
Concept paper due:	January 25, 2019
Notification of invitation to submit a full proposal:	February 15, 2019
Full proposal (by invitation) due:	March 29, 2019
Award notification:	May 1, 2019
Funding period (up to 18 months):	June 1, 2019 – November 30, 2020
Final research paper presentation:	October, 2020

OBJECTIVE

The [Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program](#) seeks to support innovative economic research on domestic nutrition assistance programs and to broaden the network of researchers applying their expertise to USDA topics. The RIDGE Program seeks applications from a diverse community of experienced nutrition assistance researchers, early career scholars, and established researchers who bring expertise in another research area. This is the second round of Tufts/UConn RIDGE funding, which builds on the success of [Round 1's innovative research projects](#). [Round 2 will aim to award approximately 1/3 of its total funding to each of the three program areas of interest: Child Nutrition Programs; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\); and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\).](#)

OVERVIEW

Federal nutrition assistance programs are central to improving dietary quality and food security among economically vulnerable Americans. The programs reach millions of families in need by

helping put food on the table and also affect higher-income families by setting nutrition standards for school meals. Given the scope and reach of these programs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture invests in nutrition assistance research, including major initiatives to understand the determinants of participation changes, program impact and administration, and the potential for innovations to improve program effectiveness and integrity. USDA pursues a portfolio of large- and small-scale research projects in diverse research disciplines. Examples of large-scale initiatives include the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS), the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) for participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study, the Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Study, and the current Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program.

To facilitate administration and build cross-project coherence, USDA has implemented important smaller-scale nutrition assistance research initiatives through extramural university-based research programs. For example, the Economic Research Service (ERS), in partnership with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), has developed behavioral economics research programs through the Duke-UNC USDA Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR Center). In 2019, FNS is supporting a new grants program at the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research, addressing food related hardships among older Americans. Finally, the oldest program of extramural research established by ERS is the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) program.

Launched in 1998, the RIDGE program, housed in ERS, has been funded by ERS and FNS to support innovative projects in nutrition assistance research and develop a community of social science scholars working in this area. Beginning Fall 2016, the RIDGE program is administered by a collaboration between two institutions with a long record of leadership in nutrition assistance research. The Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut have come together to establish the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program. The RIDGE partnership offers new initiatives to enhance visibility and relevance of the RIDGE funded projects and improve grant review management. Extramural research funding is the key function of the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program. In addition to grant funding, USDA and the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program will offer insight into policy needs, data resources, and program expertise, as well as provide grantees with guidance to help make their research more rigorous, visible, and useful.

What's New to the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program

Most features of this Request for Proposals (RFP) from the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program are unchanged from the successful RIDGE program developed through previous grant cycles. RIDGE Round 2 features include:

- Three applicant types (faculty/standard, post-doctoral and dissertation awards).
- An online application submission procedure.
- A brief open concept paper application round, followed by a full proposal round (by invitation based on review of the concept papers).
- An online webinar option for the Interim Workshop for grantees.
- A video brief along with the executive summary and research manuscript as the project deliverables.
- The final research paper presentation in October, 2020.

Background Resources

A major goal of RIDGE funding priorities is to support innovative and policy-relevant research that does not duplicate existing literature and ongoing research initiatives. Useful background material is provided on the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program website (ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu), including:

- [Previous Tufts/UConn RIDGE funded projects](#)
- Previous internal and external research supported by USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)
- Links to background program information and research literature.
- An annotated list of potential data sources.
- Format and instructions for the ERS executive summary and a simple "how to" for the video briefs.

2019 RIDGE FUNDING PROGRAM

Priority Topic Areas

All applications **must focus on nutrition assistance programs**, targeting one or several of the following:

- (1) Child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and smaller, less studied programs such as the Summer Food Service Program,
- (2) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and
- (3) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

To the extent possible, and based on the quality of applications, Round 2 of the Tufts/UConn RIDGE program will aim to **balance funding across the three areas above**, with approximately one-third of total funding devoted to each area: child nutrition programs, WIC and SNAP.

Applicants are encouraged to propose studies that respond to research priorities and topics of interest to the RIDGE funders, ERS and FNS. Several suggested topics are outlined in the areas of interest below. Additional topics and extensions of these areas are also welcome.

I. Child Nutrition Programs and WIC: Effects on Food Choices, Food Insecurity, Child Development and Health

USDA is interested in innovative policy-relevant research on the effects of participation in the child nutrition programs (including NSLP, SBP, CACFP, and SFSP) and WIC. This includes, but is not limited to, the effects of program participation on food choices, diet quality and intake, body mass index, academic outcomes, household food insecurity, and children's physical and mental health.

- Assess the effects of recent changes in nutrition standards for meals provided through NSLP and SBP on children's dietary, health, and academic outcomes, and parent and student satisfaction.

- Assess the dietary, health and cost implications of the revisions to the CACFP meal patterns. Additional outcomes of interest include the impact on CACFP participation, food insecurity and variation in outcomes across states.
- Assess the effects of WIC participation on breastfeeding, in the context of possible package changes.
- Evaluate the effects of the WIC food package changes implemented in 2009 on WIC participants' diet quality, iron nutrition/status during first 2 years of life, weight status, and participant satisfaction with WIC.

II. Child Nutrition Programs and WIC: Economic Determinants of Program Participation

USDA is highly interested in research on determinants of participation in child nutrition programs and WIC. Examples of possible questions follow, but applicants are encouraged to consider alternative questions related to explaining family (WIC, school meals) and provider (CACFP) decisions to participate in these nutrition assistance programs.

- Examine factors that influence participation in WIC as well as the retention of children after their first birthday.
- Identify supports and barriers to CACFP participation across child care centers and daycare homes.
- Analyze the determinants of cross-state variation in CACFP participation and implications for low-income families, child care providers and the state economy.
- Assess the effect of state and local school wellness policies on school meals program participation, administration costs, and financial implications to schools and states.
- Evaluate full costs of breastfeeding promotion in WIC (including the value of benefits to the breastfeeding mother-child dyad) as compared to providing infant formula by WIC State and local agencies).

III. Economic Factors in Nutrition Assistance Programs

Participant individuals and households, program administrators, and food-related businesses all may respond to economic incentives. The RIDGE Program solicits innovative research to provide a cost-benefit analysis of alternative policy choices, including implications for program participants and non-participants. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

Effective Use of Existing Data to Improve Evaluation Research

- Effectively use SNAP Quality Control data; SNAP-Ed (formerly Food Stamp Nutrition Education, or FSNE) data; school-district data on school meal participation and food purchases; WIC State food instrument issuance or redemption data; WIC EBT data; birth certificate data with WIC and Medicaid participation information; or point-of-sale scanner data.
- Provide a cost-benefit analysis of alternative policy choices to improve customer service (e.g., reducing client burden), targeting (e.g., working poor), and program integrity.

- Assess the effect of SNAP eligibility rules and program operations on household decisions and choices regarding employment, marriage, child bearing, asset purchases, or savings.

Macroeconomic Factors

- Describe the relationship between unemployment and SNAP participation (e.g., in terms of timing and magnitude, training opportunities).
- Assess how changes in nutrition assistance policies impact economic activity and household income across economic sectors, regions, and markets.
- Examine implications of major legislative acts and policy shifts, including the Affordable Care Act, for nutrition assistance programs.

IV. Nutrition Assistance as an Economic Safety Net

The RIDGE Program solicits applications to understand how benefits from multiple nutrition assistance programs and transfer cash income (e.g., TANF) are combined to affect food choices, dietary quality, food security, and self-sufficiency in the context of macroeconomic cycles and income shocks. Applicants are encouraged to consider the impact of program design decisions on program participation, use novel methods to investigate the impact of nutrition assistance on food security, and consider food security outcomes through the lens of a broader anti-poverty agenda. Examples of research questions of interest include:

Multiple Program Interactions

- Investigate effects of multiple program participation on household food security, spending choices, food choices, and diet quality
- Determine what share of households participate in multiple nutrition assistance programs versus only one or none of the programs for which they are eligible, what factors influence these participation decisions, and how the programs work individually and collectively to create a safety net.

Income Shocks

- Measure the relationship between income shocks and participation in nutrition assistance programs.
- Explore how nutrition assistance programs affect the level and stability of spending patterns of different types of households (such as elderly households, households with and without children, single-adult households, and households with and without earnings).

Food Insecurity

- Analyze the dynamics of food insecurity among various nutrition assistance population subgroups.
- Assess the correlates and consequences of persistent food insecurity.

Types of Studies

Proposed studies could include any of the following types of studies: secondary data analysis, including national datasets useful in food and nutrition assistance research; evaluations of promising interventions or natural experiments; small-scale experimental or quasi-experimental

studies; surveys and other primary data collection activities; retrospective analyses of national, state or local food policy changes; modeling studies, and cost-effectiveness analyses. For primary data collection studies, researchers are required to include a discussion of human subjects and institutional review board (IRB) issues.

Proposed studies may be conducted as extensions or supplements to existing studies if they address the RIDGE Program research priorities and offer innovative ideas. It is important that applicants specifically explain the additional gain from the requested RIDGE Program funds and how the proposed project is different from ongoing work.

For all types of studies, proposals must include specific plans for communicating and disseminating research results to a variety of diverse audiences, including researchers, advocates, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders.

Types of Grant Awards

A total of approximately \$380,000 will be awarded under this RFP.

1) Standard Research Grants

These awards are intended for research projects by investigators with a faculty (or comparative research) appointment in an institution of higher education. Each standard research grant will be awarded up to **\$50,000**, inclusive of indirect costs.

2) Post-doctoral Research Grants

These awards are intended for research support of eligible post-doctoral researchers or fellows. Each post-doctoral research award will be up to **\$30,000**, inclusive of indirect costs.

3) Dissertation Grants

These awards provide dissertation support to eligible pre-doctoral candidates. Each dissertation grant will award up to **\$15,000**, inclusive of indirect costs.

All award totals are offered for a maximum funding period of **18 months** and must include funds for required travel (see Terms of Awards).

Eligibility

For All Award Types

- Applicant organizations must be accredited private or public institutions of higher education or non-profit research organizations.
- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- Investigators must have completed appropriate education for the proposed research.

For Post-Doctoral and Dissertation Award Types

- Applicants must identify a mentor, research or dissertation advisor on the proposed project and provide evidence of their commitment to the project (e.g., letter of support, budget) and a mentor’s biosketch;
- An applicant for a post-doctoral award must hold a doctorate or terminal degree (e.g., PhD, MD, JD) at the time of the application;
- An applicant for a dissertation award must have advanced to doctoral candidacy (as determined by the applicant’s institution) at the time of the application.
- For post-doctoral and dissertation awards, the proposal must discuss methods and realistic schedule for ensuring project completion in the event of graduation or position change.

Diversity and Inclusion Commitment

The Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in nutrition assistance research. It reflects a key RIDGE Program priority to build a network of researchers whose work benefits all participants in the USDA programs. The RIDGE Program encourages applications from investigators of every race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, and disability status. RIDGE highly values diversity in perspectives, region of the country, life experiences, and backgrounds that can help expand our understanding of challenges faced by program participants and find innovative solutions to address them.

HOW TO APPLY

All applications in response to this RFP must be submitted online using the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program online system. Visit <http://ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu> and choose “Apply” under the *Funding* link. You will be required to register before you begin the application process.

The online application system provides templates and detailed instructions for each component of the grant application. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program online system. We strongly recommend that applicants log in to the system and understand online submission requirements before the submission deadline. In fairness to all applicants, the RIDGE Program will not accept late proposals.

For all types of awards, there are **two phases** in the application process:

Phase 1: Concept Paper

All applicants must submit: 1) a concept paper describing the proposed study using the provided concept paper template (up to 3 pages) and 2) biosketches for key personnel, including the principal investigator (up to 4 per project). There is no need at this stage to include a budget (except for the anticipated total amount).

Phase 2: Full Proposals (if invited)

Selected applicants will be invited to submit: (1) a full proposal using a required narrative template (up to 10 pages), (2) a budget narrative, (3) supporting documents such as letters of support (required for post-doctoral and dissertation applications; optional for other researchers).

Deadlines for proposals and information about expected funding announcements and timeline are listed below.

Timeline of Important Dates

Informational Webinar	Concept Paper Due	Notification of Invitation to Submit a Full Proposal	Invited Full Proposals Due	Notification of Awards	Awards Begin	Interim Workshop (WebEx)	Final Conference
December 17, 2018	January 25, 2019 (5pm EST)	February 15, 2019	March 29, 2019 (5pm EST)	May 1, 2019	June 1, 2019	Winter/ Spring 2020	October 2020

Terms of Awards

1. Awards will be made directly to the principal investigator’s institution. Budget amounts include indirect costs at the applicant’s institution, if required. Statutory Authority 7 U.S.C. 3310 limits indirect costs to **28.2%** on direct costs or 22% of the total funds requested. We encourage lower rates, if possible. Proposals with budgets exceeding the funding maximum, inclusive of indirect costs, will not be accepted.
2. Grantees are expected to attend an **Interim Workshop** in early spring 2020 (through WebEx or in person in Boston, MA) to discuss their early research results. Workshop attendees are asked to prepare an early draft paper and submit it to the RIDGE Program coordinator (ridge@tufts.edu) at least 10 days prior to the workshop.
3. Budget amounts must include expenses incurred for obligatory participation in October 2020 **RIDGE Outcomes Conference** (location to be determined). The RIDGE Program will not pay grantee travel costs, which should be included as part of the grant budget. Grantees should submit a draft paper to the RIDGE Coordinator (ridge@tufts.edu) at least 10 days prior to the conference.
4. Grantees are required to furnish the RIDGE Program with quarterly progress reports, with an invoice for payment. The award agreement with the grantee’s institution will stipulate a percentage of the total award that should be invoiced no earlier than submission of the deliverables in #3 and #4.
5. The revised final report, executive summary, and video brief are due no later than November 30, 2020. Notice that the Round 2 schedule allows us to make awards by early summer 2019. For applicants with busy schedules in the fall semester, it may be advisable to plan completion of most research by the end of summer 2020. The final report will consist of the paper from the fall RIDGE Outcomes Conference, revised to respond to comments. The final report may appear in the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program Discussion Paper series. The executive summary must follow a format provided by ERS. These deliverables should be submitted to ridge@tufts.edu.

REVIEW PROCESS

The full proposals will be reviewed by external referees and internal program staff using the following criteria.

Research Merit of the Proposal (35 points)

Is the proposal innovative? Are the research aims and hypotheses adequate? Are the objectives clear? Does the proposal respond to USDA and RIDGE Program research priorities, as outlined in the RFP? Will the project advance policy knowledge and support program implementation? Will the results be suitable for USDA publication? Is the study population well-justified (either nationally representative or a population experiencing high levels of unmet need or food insecurity)?

Overall Approach (30 points)

Is the research design strong and rigorous? Are the data appropriate? Is the analysis plan clear, and are the correct statistical methods chosen? Do the methods avoid unnecessary complexity? Do the methods avoid excessive detail on secondary issues, while providing sufficient information to judge the most important research decisions? Is the project feasible and realistic? Will the project really be completed as planned? Is power calculation provided and reasonable? Are limitations well-thought of and acknowledged in the proposal?

Workplan, Budget, and Cost-Effectiveness (20 points)

Does the total budget adequately support the project? Is the budget cost-effective? Is there justification for any large or unusual expenditures? Is the workplan reasonable and sufficient to ensure timely implementation and completion of the study? Are personnel, facilities, and instrumentation available? When achievement of the workplan requires collaboration, are participating partners committed? Is there a reasonable plan for communication and dissemination activities?

Proposals should include how the researcher(s) plan to acquire the data they are proposing to analyze – source, cost and time. Do applicants provide evidence of securing access to the data prior to the start of the project: e.g., a letter of support or commitment from entities from whom they plan to obtain the data?

Key Personnel (15 points)

Are the key personnel qualified to carry out the project? Are they available and committed for the work time budgeted? Does the proposal bring investigators that are new to the RIDGE program and have not been funded by RIDGE in the past? Are these new investigators to nutrition assistance research? Does the proposal connect investigators with new or

underrepresented skills or backgrounds with the field of nutrition assistance research?

Resources

Please visit the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program website at <http://ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu> for useful background information and updates on the program.

Questions

Responsible staff members at the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program are:

- Parke Wilde, *Director*
- Tatiana Andreyeva, *Associate Director*
- Sara John, *Program Coordinator*
- Whitney Hubbard, *Communications Manager*
- Jennifer Zahradnick, *Administrative Coordinator*
- Lauren Burchfield, *Financial Manager*

Please direct all questions to the RIDGE Program Coordinator (ridge@tufts.edu).